

TOWN/COMMERCIAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Fiscal Year 2007

CLARIFICATION OF OUR CHARGE

The Town/Commercial Relations Committee (TCRC) has the following charge and approach to its responsibilities:

- We advise the Select Board and Town Manager on issues affecting the business community.
- We have an additional role as the Parking Commission, providing the business perspective on changes to parking regulations and the assessment of parking needs in the Town.
- We act as a conduit for suggestions, comments and complaints for the Town's current business community.
- We perceive ourselves as a think tank, considering "big ideas" and futuristic possibilities for Amherst and responding to the needs of Town Meeting and Select Board for this thinking, but also lead the way.
- We are not pro-business development to the point of changing the nature of Amherst. We want sustainable, smart growth, not growth for growth's sake; we are looking for businesses with a good fit to existing businesses, not superstores.

The TCRC needs to operate at full strength, so there is a need to fill vacancies in a timely fashion with qualified, representative people in the right mix of business and at-large members.

The Select Board needs to seriously consider recommendations and policy proposals brought forward by the TCRC, as we are one of the few groups in town advocating for the business community.

DISCUSSIONS ENGAGED IN AND ACTIONS TAKEN

- TCRC made suggestions on holiday parking regulations which were accepted and published by the Select Board.
- CPC Representative – Barry Roberts was appointed to represent the TCRC on the Comprehensive Planning Committee.
- Permitting process – We addressed the Select Board, urging a streamlining of the process to eliminate or greatly reduce the image of a business un-friendly environment.
- 2007 Annual Town Meeting:
 - Supported Article 11 re Main and High Street rezoning to B-VC.
 - Voted unanimously to support in its entirety all 3 recommendations, Motions #1, #2, and #3 by the Board of Assessors, not to have a split tax rate. The concern is that a split tax rate would prove repressive to the business community.
 - Voted to reject the Article on Energy Conservation by Maintaining the Night Sky.
 - Voted to support the hiring of an economic development director, and think that for that position to succeed, it needs the broad support of the Town and Select Board, recognizing the need to increase the tax base and a vibrant downtown.

- Select Board requested and TCRC agreed to conduct a review of the 1992 Downtown Community Action Plan, identifying those recommendations that had been taken since publication and the recommendations that have been made obsolete by events.

POSITIONS OR INITIATIVES WE ENDORSE

Downtown Action Plan of 1992 (general updates and responses):

1. We have enough green space; we need ample parking; we can ill afford more parks at the expense of parking spaces when existing parks (Kendrick) have not been fully developed.
2. Town leaders need to communicate a clear message that we are business-friendly, through publicly displayed attitudes, zoning regulations, and staffing; eliminate need for so much special-permit zoning: most normal business uses should be by right; local boards need to each reflect a business-friendly climate, also reflecting diversity and what's good for our community as a whole.
3. The Town should promote the development of the north end of downtown by establishing incentives to attract development.
4. The Town needs to support full transportation access, including through the accommodation of cars, as well as ample public transportation, and pedestrian access; and the Town should be pedestrian-friendly in its design.
5. The Comprehensive Planning Committee needs to develop specific types of programming in the Master Plan that accomplish many of the ideas in the Downtown Action Plan.
6. Strategic vision needs to include economic development; a director could make this operational.
7. Amherst's true diversity depends on the ability of many types of people being able to live and work here.
8. There needs to be better marketing of improvements, activities, and initiatives downtown.
9. Creative ways to beautify downtown need to be developed (murals instead of graffiti).
10. The Town needs to invest in and maintain infrastructure, including signage, streetscape improvements, and public art.

Zoning:

1. There is limited available land remaining for business development in the Town; as a result, real consideration should be given to rezoning remaining parcels for commercial/business uses.
2. Too often in the past the opinions of a few outspoken people have outweighed the benefit of zone changes to the Town as a whole.
3. We are sensitive to the needs of abutters regarding traffic problems, sidewalks and other infrastructure issues; however, the use of contract zoning to extract concessions from potential developers should be minimized, if used at all. Our economic viability and business growth will only be corrected with a long-term vision rather than the short-sighted limitations that contract zoning seeks to impose.

Respectfully submitted,

Town Commercial Relations Committee
Mark L Parent
Chair